DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 890 UD 033 556

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TITLE Transforming Multicultural Knowledge: Attending to the Stories of Indian American High School Students' Efforts To Negotiate Self-Representations.
PUB DATE 2000-04-28
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Asian Americans; *Career Choice; *Ethnicity; High School Students; High Schools; *Social Behavior; Student Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *Indian Americans

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed how the model minority stereotype effectively masks the marginalization of Asian Americans even in multicultural educational discourse. The study examined issues related to academic achievement, career choice, and identity confronting Indian American high school students in New York City. Researchers interviewed 10 Indian American students, 5 from each of 2 contrasting schools (a competitive public high school and a private school). Students completed a series of three in-depth, semi-structured interviews that focused on the messages from school and home that these students said they received in relation to academic achievement, career choice, social behavior, and identity. Additional data came from an event sampling guide, used for observing each of the participants. Results indicated that, in relation to academic achievement and career choice, these students experienced pressure to excel and plan ahead for careers that would ensure future financial success and security. In relation to social behavior and identity, given the differences in the home and school contexts and cultures, students experienced interracial, interethnic, and intercultural dissonance and tensions in negotiating self-representation and identity in each setting. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
April 24-28, 2000, New Orleans, LA

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Transforming Multicultural Knowledge: Attending to the Stories of Indian American High School Students' Efforts to Negotiate Self-representations

This paper examines Asian American education as a discourse of marginality in relation to the larger discourse of multicultural education at the macro/systemic level as well as at the micro/local level. Specifically, the paper analyzes how the model minority stereotype effectively masks the marginalization of Asian Americans even in multicultural educational discourse. To that end, the paper draws on postcolonial perspectives which allow us to interrogate both our implicatedness in our own marginalization as well as our struggles to represent ourselves. That is, the analysis focuses on our particular situatedness (historical, racial, cultural) and the lived contradictions of participating in extant power structures (for instance, an educational system premised on Western, Eurocentric knowledge as the norm) even as we attempt to resist and transform them. At the micro/local level, an analysis of the findings of a qualitative, interview study conducted with Indian American high school students reveals how such social forces as race, ethnicity, and culture operate in local contexts of school, home, and community to perpetuate the marginalization of Asian American students.

This paper is also part of a panel which articulates the theoretical implications of issues -- such as othering, co-option in our marginalization, and negotiating self-representation -- related to the marginalization of Asian American education within the larger discourse of multicultural education. In that sense, the paper and the panel are envisioned as an intervention to bring to light particular realities, difference(s), and struggles of Asian America in contrast to the stereotypical representation as the monolithic model minority. Lisa Lowe (1996) has urged us to "organize, resist and theorize *as* Asian Americans" (p. 68) by engaging in "internal critical dialogues about difference" (p. 71). This panel is one such effort. By focusing on "emerging difference" the panel underscores recent research and writings which have begun addressing the underrepresentation in curriculum, teaching, and teacher education of Asian Americans (for instance, Goodwin, Genishi, Asher & Woo, 1997; Nakanishi

& Nishida, 1995; Rong & Preissle, 1997) as well as issues related to negotiating racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual/gendered identity and self-representation (for instance, Asher, 1997, 1999b; Asher, Goodwin, Genishi, & Woo, 1997; Kumashiro, 1998; Lee, 1996; Woo, 1998). It also serves to foster "an internal critical dialogue" across studies focused on schooling and identity in relation to students from different Asian American backgrounds. The fact that the four papers in this panel address identity and representation,and draw on studies which were conducted with high school students from different Asian American communities speaks to this "emerging difference." The synthesis of this growing body of critical literature in Asian American education has implications for enhancing our resistance to marginalization and the transformation of multicultural educational discourse. It serves as a springboard for dislocating such hegemonic representations as the model minority, building alliances, and asserting difference(s) and agency as Asian Americans in the educational and social contexts of the U.S.

Therefore, within this context, the main questions this paper considers are: What forces contribute to the marginalization of the discourse of Asian American education? What are the microprocesses, at the local level, which operate to "other" Asian American students, despite the seeming advantages of their model minority status? And, what are the implications in terms of re-situating Asian American education and transforming multicultural educational discourse?

The sections that follow discuss the construction of multicultural knowledge; the marginalization of Asian American educational discourse at the broader level and students at the specific/local level; and the implications for transformation.

Re-visioning Multicultural Knowledge: through a Postcolonial Lens

The role of schools in the maintenance of the status quo and the process of social reproduction in an unequal society has been widely discussed in educational literature (Althusser, 1971; Apple, 1978; McLaren, 1994a). In recent times, the discourse and practice of

multicultural education have created new spaces for re-presentation for communities of color in the United States. However, multicultural education itself has been critiqued for its reliance on the "language of inclusion" which ultimately serves to legitimize and maintain the dominance of the mainstream culture (Apple, 1992; McCarthy, 1993, 1994). McCarthy (1993) argues for a critical approach to multiculturalism which presents a "more systematic critique of the construction of school knowledge and the privileging of Eurocentrism and Westernness in the American school curriculum" (p. 294) and focuses on the relationality of school knowledge and the complexities of racial identity formation of minority and majority groups (McCarthy, 1993). Therefore, rather than considering racial and ethnic identities as a given, multicultural education would examine race, class, gender, culture, ethnicity, and history as dynamic, intersecting, sociopolitical forces which shape not only the lives of students and teachers, but also curriculum, teaching, and teacher knowledge. Such an approach would allow us to bring to light, analyze, and deconstruct not only the macro and micro processes which operate to ensure that Western knowledge and perspectives remain at the center of the curriculum, but also the struggles of those on the margins to negotiate identity and self-representation.

As teachers and academics, we are participants in the very educational systems and discourses we are attempting to transform. Postcolonial and feminist writings offer us a number of useful points of analysis which allow us to examine the dynamics and contradictions of being implicated in the very relations of power against which we struggle. This implicatedness brings with it the threat of the loss of identity, of "forget[ting] ourselves" (Minh-ha, 1989) as we necessarily become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor (hooks, 1990, p. 146; Lorde, 1984, p. 114). Thus, we often find ourselves engaged in the effort to negotiate ideas and recenter the knowledge of the different cultures/realities we encounter. In this process, Asian Americans and others who live in multiple cultures -- "inhabit borderlands" (Anzaldúa, 1987) -- arrive at a new, hybrid consciousness -- a "mestiza consciousness" (Anzaldúa, 1987) -- which emerges out of their often contradictory lived experiences. Therefore, from a postcolonial perspective, even as multicultural representations

would recognize cultural differences and specificities, they would also address the contradictions in and dynamic character of the lives of those who struggle at the margins (Asher, 1999c).

Another contribution of postcolonial, feminist writers is their emphasis on self-reflexivity and agency as well as on deconstructing such binaries as "Oppressor and Oppressed," "Self and Other" in order to resist being co-opted in one's own marginalization (Asher, 1999a). For instance, Collins (1991) notes that as "outsiders within" Black female intellectuals have used their marginality for self-definition and self-valuation in the movement away from being represented as the dehumanized, objectified Other towards the Self as subject. Given that this marginality is experienced "at the intersection of multiple structures of domination" (p. 41), Collins suggests that it is necessary to move beyond "dichotomous oppositional differences" (p. 42) in order to identify the dialectical tensions among these interconnected systems of oppression and co-option. This perspective allows us to realize "the freedom both to be different and to be part of the solidarity of humanity" (Collins, 1991, p. 54). Such a perspective allows us to start from and work within the reality that, more often than not, as academics and/or activists of color, we are simultaneously *both* agents for change and participants in systems which oppress. In fact, hooks (1990) suggests "choosing the margin as a space of radical openness" from which to resist, to develop counter-hegemonic cultural practices and alliances. For example, Mohanty (1991) offers "storytelling or autobiography (the practice of writing) as a discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency" (p. 39) as a specific strategy, noting the role of written narratives "in the production of self- and collective consciousness" (p. 33).

Thus, drawing on postcolonial and feminist perspectives, multiculturalism in teacher education would examine the dynamic, contradictory forces of identity formation, representation, and co-option as they relate to the lives of students and teachers on the margins. It would also engage future teachers in critical self-reflexivity which would enable them to create classrooms where "students can tell their own stories, listen closely to the

stories of others . . ." (McLaren, 1994b, p. 217). Critiquing the ideological conformity implied by "hallway multiculturalism" (p. 546) in teacher education, Hoffman (1996) argues for a self-reflexive multiculturalism which engages teachers in the critique of multicultural education and itself models "the kinds of learning about culture that we want to encourage in students" (p. 565). Within such a framework, teachers and students are producers of knowledge, drawing on history and a range of cultural resources, to engage in critical reflection on the organization and arrangement of knowledge in schooling, and on the connections between the curriculum and the differential experiences and futures of minority and majority youth beyond the school door (McCarthy, 1994).

Asian American Education: In the Margins

As noted earlier, a body of literature documenting the marginalization of Asian Americans, their co-option as the monolithic "model minority" in the educational and broader social context of the U.S., and the need for self-representation has been emerging over the past few years (see, for instance, Asher, in press; Goodwin, Genishi, Asher & Woo, 1997; Lee, 1996; Lowe, 1996; Nakanishi & Nishida, 1995). This literature documents the macro- and micro-processes and realities which marginalize Asian American students, teachers, and communities; shape their identities and representations; maintain their underrepresentation in such areas as the humanities, social sciences, arts, politics, and, of course, teaching and teacher education; and reify the model minority stereotype.

The model minority stereotype "suggests that Asian Americans are 'outwhiting whites' and have overcome discrimination to be more successful than whites" and, therefore, when they are included in the discourse on race, it is "to talk about their apparent 'success'" (Lee, 1996, p. 5). For instance, as model minorities, they are stereotyped as being economically successful, while other racial minorities are stereotyped in "overtly negative ways" (Lee, 1996, p.5). This popular portrayal of Asian Americans presents a monolithic image and ignores their diverse realities in terms of ethnicities, immigration histories, socioeconomic status and

academic achievement (Asher, Goodwin, Genishi, & Woo, 1997; Chun, 1995; Pang, 1995). Under this stereotype, Asian American students are largely represented as being untroubled and compliant, excelling in math and science and succeeding in spite of racial barriers and discrimination.

Analyzing the effect of the model minority stereotype at the macro level, Lee (1996) recognizes it as a "hegemonic device" which serves the interests of the dominant culture by inviting the participation of Asian Americans in their own marginalization and, at the same time, separating them from other minority communities. In terms of its operation at the micro level, Asher (in press) has analyzed the microprocess which factor into "constructing the Asian American self as an academic and professional success story,"thereby reifying the model minority stereotype. Young Asian Americans internalize messages from home, school, and the broader social context and come to see themselves as choosing financially promising careers such as medicine and business, over other interests such as theatre, journalism, and teaching. Further, such broader social forces as social class, the socioeconomic and cultural realities confronted by immigrant parents, and specific cultural expectations intersect and shape the particular realities of individual students. As she has noted, "Such apparently benign characterizations become part of the self-knowledge of Asian Americans and, in effect, ensure that they do live by the label [model minority] in order to continue being accepted within the mainstream context" (Asher, in press). Thus, Asian Americans internalize the oppressor and remain on the margins in a number of fields, "whose primary vehicle for professional activities is either linguistic communication or interpersonal contacts" (Chun, 1995, p. 105). Therefore, in terms of "story," "representation" and "voice," Asian Americans narratives are generally absent in the very arenas, including that of multicultural educational discourse, which offer opportunities to raise and address these issues.

In order to shed light on the microprocesses of marginalization, I turn now to the stories of 10 Indian American high school students in New York City. I analyze the (multi)cultural realities they encounter at school and home as well as their struggles to

negotiate self-representation in terms of identity, social context, and curriculum. The discussion reveals the intersection of the forces of race, culture, and class at which young the Asian Americans are "othered," despite the seeming advantages of their "model minority" status. The implications for rethinking school knowledge and multiculturalism as well as for community involvement and agency are discussed.

The Study

The study was designed, within a constructivist framework, to unearth and analyze issues related to academic achievement, career choice, and identity confronting Indian American high school students in New York City. The study was originally focused on a broader population -- South Asian American students -- and the plan was to interview Bangladeshi American, Indian American, and Pakistani American students in New York City high schools. However, given various exigencies encountered in the field, the sample comprised only of Indian American students. Further, the original intention was to interview students from two public schools where Asian Americans are represented in large numbers -- a competitive "math and science" high school in New York City and a comprehensive high school located in an area where there is a large concentration of Asians and Asian Americans. While it was possible to gather data in one of the competitive, public high schools, once again, given various exigencies in the field, it proved to be impossible to do so in a comprehensive high school. Eventually the original plan was altered, and instead a private school was used. The significance and implications of both these alterations in the original vision of the study are discussed in later this paper, in relation to multiculturalism and the situatedness of Asian Americans in school and society.

Altogether, 10 Indian American high school students in the New York City area were interviewed for this qualitative study. Five students from each of two contrasting schools -- a competitive public high school, "Wentworth," and a private school, "Greenacres" -- were interviewed (see Appendix A for an overview of the two schools). Fiercely competitive,

Wentworth is one of the three "math and science" public high schools in New York City. Its student body is 50% Asian American. This statistical reality bears out the model minority stereotype in that it reflects Asian Americans as excelling in math and science. In contrast to Wentworth, Greenacres is a private school, with 8.2% Asian Americans in its student body. Diversity in the student population at Wentworth is evident in the number of ethnic-identified student organizations. By contrast, Greenacres, which is much smaller than Wentworth, has one organization addressing diversity-related issues and sub-groups have begun emerging.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify participants for the interviews. The sample comprised of female and male eleventh and twelfth grade students, all of whom had been attending school in the U.S. since at least the first grade. A screening questionnaire, which was used to identify potential participants, also yielded information regarding their particular socio-cultural/ethnic backgrounds (see Appendix B). This allowed for a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds to be represented in the sample.

A series of three, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, conducted with each of the participants, served as the main source of data. The interviews focused on the messages from school and home that these students said they received, in relation to four areas: academic achievement, career choice, social behavior, and identity. The screening questionnaire and an event sampling guide, used for observing each of the participants, served as sources additional data.

Broadly, the study found that, in relation to academic achievement and career choice, these young Asian Americans experience pressure to excel and plan ahead for careers that ensure future financial security and success. And, in relation to social behavior and identity, given the differences in the home and school contexts and cultures, they experience interracial, interethnic, and intercultural dissonance and tensions in negotiating self-representation and identity in each setting.

Here, I draw from the larger study to share data which reveal the particular, quotidian realities -- the microprocesses -- of negotiating multiculturalism in which the 10 Indian

American high school students engage. I focus specifically on their efforts to negotiate self-representations in terms of identity, social context and curriculum to understand the processes of marginalization that operate in the apparently multicultural contexts of their schools and homes in New York City.

Negotiating Identity, Culture, and Curriculum: Indian American High School Students at School and Home

Despite the "multicultural" contexts of their schools and New York City, the participants struggle in various ways to represent themselves, their identities and cultural backgrounds. These efforts occur within the classroom, in extracurricular contexts within the school as well as in the contexts of the home and the community. *Interpreting and asserting identity, seeking social and cultural representation,* and *interrogating the curriculum* are the distinct and interrelated themes that emerge from the analysis of the dynamics of multiculturalism in these particular contexts.

In their schools as well as in their home contexts, the participants engage in argument, debate, discussion to *interpret and assert identity.* While the school represents the "American" context in which they struggle to assert their identities and cultures as Asian Americans, the home represents the "Indian" context in which they struggle to assert themselves as "Americans" (Asher, 1999b). For instance, even in the visibly diverse context of Wentworth, with half of its student body being Asian American, Sanjoy finds himself struggling with the realization that asserting a hybrid identity -- "being a hyphenated American" -- is a contested issue in the context of the school. He finds that his "American" (read "white") peers expect others (read "those of color") should be just like them.

> When you come into school, totally different type of life. Clash of two very distinctly different cultures. There aren't that many -- I mean between Asian cultures there are things that overlap -- between Asian and American cultures there aren't that many many chains of thought or beliefs or practices that overlap. And when direct, direct contradiction comes in you have to, I mean you can't retain your Indian values. You have to give them up to fit in with everyone else in this society.

. . . . . .

Once we're in school, I think that an American lifestyle is one that is advocated by everyone. I think, er, the American kids . . . they want us and they expect us to be American. I mean I've even heard a kid, . . . when we had this discussion about being hyphenated Americans, like, Indian-American, "Why do you have to say that? Why can't you just say American?" And you can't bring out the argument that I am half Indian. I am not a whole American. And there's this thing that you should embrace American culture, which is in essence European culture. That's not realized by many people. The fact that a lot of people believe that America has a distinct culture that everyone can embrace. And a thing with diversity in terms of what, how you should be, that's not, I don't think that's advocated by anyone -- that you can, you come from, you should have diverse influences in how you lead your life. I think that homogeneous, homogeneity is something that everyone likes, conformity. Something everyone likes 'cuz that's where people get security from. If everyone looks the same as you, you don't have that much to worry about.

Similarly, Vijay talks about how difficult it is to get his non-Asian peers at Greenacres to understand particular issues -- such as respect for parents and elders and compliance with their wishes -- with which he as well as other young Asian Americans grapple, *as* Asian Americans.

[L]ike, I don't know if you remember what, um, that boy, David [a fellow Asian American student], was saying, in my English class that day.

. . . . . .

Oh, especially, like what he was saying about parents. About how parents are regarded, I think, very differently by different cultures. Like, particularly, I think Asians in general have a very, very, extremely high level of respect for their parents and their wishes. And a lot of times, they tell you to do something and you do it. You don't say, "Why?" You just do it -- because, well, they are your parents. But if I were to try to convey that message to a lot of my non-Asian friends, they would just, they would just gawk almost. They would be like, "Well, if I don't want to do it, I would just say 'No!'" . . . I don't understand how I could convey to them [non-Asian peers] . . . something which has been embedded in me for my entire life. Like everywhere I go, I mean in terms of my family anyway, and family friends who are all Indian, that this is something that is the same way that my non-Asian friends can just go out without telling their parents something or just say "No!" to something that they ask them to do. And the same way they take that so for granted, is the same way I take so for granted that I have to do the exact opposite.

While Sanjoy's and Vijay's words convey a sense of their struggles to interpret identity by attempting to assert differences, Sharmila, a student at Greenacres and the most "American-identified" of all 10 participants, sees herself fitting in as an American: "I was born

here, so, like, I'm more of an American, I think, than I am an Indian. . . . I'm, like, when I go to India, I don't fit in at all." Further she believes that, unlike her, most of the other students of Indian descent fit in with the model minority stereotype.

> Like, I think some people have a certain view, they have, like, a pre-set notion of what, like, an Indian person, like, an Indian student, or child, or whatever would be like. They usually tend to be more quiet and whatever, like, and very smart and whatever. And sometimes, like, I don't know, like, most of the Indian students in this school they are, like, quiet, and, like, you know, most of them are very smart kids. So, I think, you know, that that makes the thing believable. . . . I don't think they expect, like, everyone to be like that. . . . Like, I know myself, I'm not quiet and, like, I've been friends with a lot of people in my grade since fifth grade so, I don't think they see me as any different from themselves.

So, although Sharmila is not struggling to interpret and assert her identity in terms of her particular differences as an Asian American, and, in fact, knows herself as "American," she has internalized stereotypical representations of Asian Americans which she herself applies to others of Indian descent.

Similarly, these young Asian Americans struggle to interpret and assert identity in the context of the home, where their "Americanness" becomes an issue. Modes of dress and appearance, choice of music, respect for elders and teachers, choice of friends and social activities are among the factors which relate to negotiating identity in the home context. For instance, Poonam, a student at Greenacres, says:

> They [parents] want me to respect my teachers. And my elders. I get into trouble if I get "too fresh." They don't like my tone of voice if I get annoyed and show it in my voice.
> . . . .
> When they think we're talking fresh they say, "You're being too American." I consider myself American. I was born and raised here.

Particularly, in relation to their home contexts, the participants also struggle with asserting identifications with other "minority" communities -- or at least those which their

parents and/or other family members believe reflect such identifications. Witness the following dialogue with Nitin:

> Nitin: Like, er, like, before, like, baggy pants -- you know you can't wear baggy pants. But then as we [Nitin and his twin] keep wearing, you know, they [parents] . . .
>
> R: Um hm, you wore their resistance down. What's with baggy pants?
>
> Nitin: Beepers and things like that. Whatever, you know. Like, you are turning Black or something.

In fact, according to Nitin, even his peers at the ISO at Wentworth question his preferred mode of dress: "Like these guys bother me a lot. Like, 'Oh, you know, why d'you wear baggy pants?' and all that." Similarly, Mary's parents disapprove of her sister dressing like "African Americans" and wearing "color-block shirts." In fact, Mary says that they warn her sister that her "'grades are gonna match theirs and go down,' or whatever."

These stories offer glimpses of how, in their day to day lives, at school and home, the participants engage in dialogue and negotiation to *interpret and assert identity*. A range of verbal and non-verbal exchanges, which occur in the quotidian contexts of their classrooms, hallways, and homes, convey conflicting messages to the participants regarding their racial/ethnic/cultural identities. These exchanges exemplify the microprocesses of marginalization of difference(s) as well as the specific struggles to resist the same at school and home. They also reveal the range of identifications -- from "hyphenated American," to "Asian American," to "American" (which may even represent other minority cultures) -- with which these young Indian Americans relate and attempt to situate themselves at school and home.

The participants also *seek social and cultural representation*, particularly in the contexts of their school. Each school has student organizations and events which serve as sites of representation for students of color. Wentworth has a number of groups representing different ethnicities, including, among them, the Indian Student Organization (ISO). For Mary, the ISO serves as a space of support and cultural affirmation:

> I have, like, a small sub-community within --small, like, sub-community, like, a support, sort of, within -- like, this larger thing [the school] where my individuality might not be accepted, respected, or, like, acknowledged -- that I am different from everyone else. But within this group, I realize that you know my difference is, like, echoed or maybe even made larger because, you know, like, they're, like, around me . . . .

By contrast, Greenacres has one umbrella organization focused on diversity and sub-groups have been emerging. At Greenacres, the school assembly or "chapel" also serves as a site of representation for students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds -- for instance, Greenacres has an annual Diwali chapel. According to Sharmila:

> Because this school tries to have, like, you know each religion or group or whatever have some kind of chapel to make the others aware. . . . . They light the candles and they had some of the students speak about what it means.

And yet, in both school contexts, the participants encounter misinformation and experience alienation regarding their cultural backgrounds. The participants also talk about racial tensions, divides, and/or episodes in the contexts of their school. For instance, Mohan speaks about the misinformation he encounters in the context of Greenacres:

> Nobody really knows about religion. About Hindu religion. A few people come up to me and ask me about Buddhism -- I'm like, "I'm not a Buddhist" . . . As far as them knowing about, like, culture, Indian culture, they all like Indian food. (Mohan and Researcher laughing.) They say, like, the accent, as portrayed on TV and they tend to try and imitate it. It tends to upset me and I tell them to stop.

And in the context of Wentworth, the participants talk about the segregation among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. According to Nitin:

> In this school like basically, people stay with -- like, the Koreans stay with the Koreans, segregate, like, the Blacks . . . Like, you know we have a Black spot in the cafeteria. Where all the Black kids sit, like, all the way in the back.

And Amit reflects on how an "Indian" table spontaneously generated itself in the cafeteria.

> Actually, that's kind of funny. Today we got our new schedules . . . who is in their lunch period, and this, and that. And, um, at lunch you generally get together with your friends whoever they are. . . . . And, then, like, I was with, like, a couple of Indians. And then, one by one, all of them just keep coming. So we were, like, about eight or nine Indians, like, just sitting there. Then everyone was, like, you know, "It looks a little strange." . . . . But, I mean, you know, we all, like, hang out together, so . . . I guess it is fine.

Thus, at first glance, both schools serve as multicultural contexts which allow for students from diverse backgrounds to represent themselves. But a close look at some of the day-to-day realities and exchanges in each school reveals interracial and interethnic divides and tensions which are part of the lived experiences of these young students and their peers. Further, under the model minority stereotype, these students may be seen as privileged in terms of at least their academic abilities and environments, and also, possibly, in terms of the socioeconomic status of their families (particularly in the case of the students from Greenacres, where parents pay expensive tuition). And yet, despite this seeming advantage, even in a school such as Wentworth where Asian Americans comprise 50% of the student body, these young participants struggle to assert themselves and find spaces of self-representation within the larger context of the school.

The third area of analysis of the multicultural discourse at Wentworth and Greenacres is the curriculum. The formal curriculum of both schools includes content related to Asia, typically in social studies and literature classes. For instance, with regard to Greenacres, Mohan says:

> When I was younger, they taught us about Gandhi and all that. When I was in 10th grade and stuff. Nowadays we talk about India's nuclear capacity. Err, when I was a lot younger, 7th grade and stuff, we'd talk about, like, the culture, the Eastern cultures and societies. Yeah, so I guess, I mean, it's there. Especially like conversations, spices and all that.

And Amit notes that Wentworth "does offer an Asian American literature course" but that it emphasizes "Chinese, Japanese, that type" of writings over South Asian ones. Further, in each school, the students also encounter opportunties to write and/or present on topics related to their South Asian backgrounds. For instance, Amit has presented on Jainism and Poonam has written essays pertaining to her culture.

At the same time, they *interrogate the curriculum* in terms of the depth, quality and quantity of representation it affords Asian Americans. For instance, with regard to conversations with teachers and non-Indian peers at Wentworth, Anita recalls expressions of interest in the form of "vague questions about India" or "Indian food."

> Anita: Yeah. They have asked me, like, "Why do you wear this? Why do they have the red dot?" Or . . . um, in English class last time I read, I, like, told a story about, like, the Ramayana (a major Hindu epic) thing -- some story I told about Hindu religion. . . . . When we studied India, my teacher was, like, very interested. My friends ask sometimes -- vague questions about India.
>
> R: So, sometimes in class it has come up too, and in your discussions with friends too. And when you read the Ramayana, or, [rather] part of it -- did you, like, volunteer, or, how did it come about?
>
> Anita: It was in an English class and we were -- in the beginning of every day, somebody went up for five minutes, and, I think, like, told a story or read something. And I just decided on this story. . . . My teachers, they like Indian food. They're, like, "Oh, I went to this place the other day. It's, like, such nice food. I love all the food you guys make. It's so nice." They talk about the food mostly.

And, according to Amit, his cultural background is not really represented in Wentworth's curriculum.

> I haven't seen it at all because, I remember, freshman year we were gonna -- you know, you learn about World History, and you learn about whatever -- China, Japan,

> India also -- but we actually skipped that topic because there wasn't enough time left. So, I don't think we got to learn it in school. So, I haven't really seen it anywhere else. But, maybe, last year . . . I read this book *Siddhartha* -- have you read it? . . .
> . . . . . .
> Herman Hesse, but I think it was, like, Indian based, like. But that's basically as far as I've gotten with the Indian view represented here.

Similarly, BK notes that Greenacres does not offer Asian studies courses but that his 10th grade history curriculum was broad and covered events in Asia, Europe, and Central America. Beyond that, BK does not see his particular background represented either in discussions with peers or in the curricular offerings at Greenacres. At the same time, he is aware that students have been petitioning for courses which would be representative of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

> But I think that if one group petitions . . . to start a new course for African American studies, then I am sure that the Asians are going to petition, the Whites and the Italians are going to petition, the Europeans would already have their own course. Err, the Asians, the Polynesians, maybe some other people. Cuz if [only] one ethnic course is created, then there are going to be a lot of discontented people.

He fears that "The school would end up being segregated according to ethnic backgrounds."

Again, despite the apparently multicultural contexts and student populations of the two schools, curricular representations of Indian/South Asian cultures and realities are, largely, incidental and byte-sized in duration. Often, they are limited to the obvious -- such as the "red dots" on the foreheads of Indian women -- and that which is easily available in New York City -- for instance, Indian food. Although current realities -- such as India's nuclear capacity -- may be represented in the curriculum, it also happens that content related to Asia/Asians may be bypassed in the interests of time. Furthermore, even the prospect of creating niches for studies pertaining to different marginalized racial/ethnic groups is seen as potentially threating to the integrity of the school's curriculum. Thus, the Eurocentric norm continues to prevail. The very questions raised and approaches adopted for modifying the curriculum are, at best, premised on an inclusionary model of multiculturalism. Spaces of critical

interrogation, analysis, and synthesis of diverse perspectives remain on the margins of the curriculum.

Discussion and Implications

As noted earlier in this paper, due to various exigencies in the field, I found that I was unable to interview Bangladeshi American and Pakistani American students, and that I was unable to draw participants from a comprehensive high school. As a result, I ended up with 10 Indian American participants who appeared to fit the model minority image of Asian Americans, in that they excelled academically and/or they came from affluent, upper middle class homes.

For instance, at Wentworth, I was directed by the school administration to the ISO and also to the Organization of Muslim Students (OMS) -- where I believe there were students from different South Asian backgrounds -- to identify potential participants. However, the OMS refused to consider having any of its members participate in my study, and, in the course of gathering data, I came to learn that there were deep interracial and interethnic divides among the students within the larger context of the school. In that case, how "multicultural" *is* the context of this school? *Further, in terms of the macro-context, I was aware that the U.S. had been at war with Iraq a few years prior to my collecting data and that, more immediately, the World Trade Center in New York City had withstood a terrorist attack. I wondered in what ways these factors, at least indirectly, contributed to the reluctance of the OMS to have me -- an "outsider" -- interview any of its members.*

Similarly, with regard to Indian American students in a comprehensive high school in New York City, I wondered how the lives of these students may have revealed realities which are different from those of the 10 participants. For instance, typically, the potential participants I identified at the comprehensive high school were not permitted by their parents to participate in the study. I wondered how factors related to being immigrants (language, social class, familiarity with context of schooling, security of one's status) might have influenced the decision of the parents. By contrast, there were no denials from the parents of potential participants at either Wentworth or Greenacres.

Thus, the study contributes to the literature on Asian American education and multicultural education by bringing into focus a population about which little has been written. However, in the interests of developing critical, self-reflexive educational discourses, this study also needs to analyze the social forces which operated to limit the scope of the sample by eliminating the voices of potential participants whose stories may directly challenge the model minority stereotype. (See Asher, 1999b for a more detailed discussion.)

In order to transform multicultural education, decenter Western, Eurocentric knowledge and perspectives, and re-locate discourses of marginality such as Asian American education, we need to intervene at the macro and micro levels. In other words, as academics and activists writing from the margins, we can engender this transformation by participating actively in multicultural educational discourse as well as by bringing to light the stories of the different experiences of Asian Americans in their particular educational and social contexts. As agents in this effort to transform the extant educational and social sytems in which we participate, we need to consider a number of issues related to theory and practice.

With regard to multicultural educational discourse and practice, first, we need to emphasize context-specificity. That is, instead of relying mainly on information about the histories and cultures of diverse students, multicultural curriculum and teaching also need to address the fact that these histories and cultures can be fully understood only when we relate them to the particular lives of our students. To that end, a context-specific approach to multiculturalim would draw and build on the students' own lived experiences and interpretations of their racial, ethnic, cultural, and gendered realities. Secondly, then, multicultural education would recognize the dynamic nature and the processes of negotiating identities and cultures, particularly in the lives of adolescents. This implies an on-going interrogation of content knowledge in order to represent the fluidity of identity and culture, rather than relying on fixed, often stereotypical images. Third, multicultural discourse and practice would emphasize a close reading of written narratives, autobiographies, and case

studies (Hoffman, 1996; Mohanty, 1991) to engender a dialogue among students which acknowledges and builds on their different stories. Such a multicultural vision looks towards a "narrative space where conditions may be created where students can tell their own stories, listen closely to the stories of others . . ." (McLaren, 1994b, p. 217). Fourth, teacher education would emphasize the importance of critical self-reflexivity for the meaningful practice of multiculturalism. That is, future teachers would learn ways of interrogating their own knowledge and practice of multiculturalism in order to challenge and deconstruct their own as well as their students' assumptions regarding racial, ethnic, and gendered identities and cultures. This also implies preparing teachers to recognize, work with and reflect on the contradictions of participating in the very systems that they, as educators, need to change as part of the progress toward greater social justice. Finally, multicultural education needs to consider drawing on parents and communities in order to address the barriers to dialoguing across difference(s) which exist *outside* the classroom and the school. For, as hooks (1990) has noted, "the work of resistance may begin not only with the colonizer/oppressor but "it may begin with one's segregated, colonized community and family" (p. 151).

Therefore, closer to home (so to speak), with regard specifically to Asian American education, we need to deconstruct the model minority stereotype and engender a dialogue which addresses (our) differences, at the general level of theory/discourse as well as at the specific level of practice. Educational researchers need to develop further the analyses of the ways in which the model minority stereotype operates as a "hegemonic device" (Lee, 1996) and serves to co-opt us in the masking of our own particular concerns, struggles, and even silencing. To that end, our task is to document how the intersecting forces of race, class, and ethnicity operate not only to realize the model minority stereotype but also to bypass our stories of difference. We also need to communicate and work with the parents and communities of Asian American students to support their increased participation in the process of education. This would enhance not only the agency and self-representation of Asian Americans in education, but also the deconstruction of the interracial barriers which

isolate different communities of color. By establishing such "horizontal affiliations" (Lowe, 1996. p. 71) with other groups on the margins, we are able to build coalitions through our shared struggles and efforts at transformation.

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Appendix A

The School Context -- Two Schools in New York City

Wentworth[1]	Greenacres
•Large, public high school, grades 9-12 -- total number of students is about 2,750. •50% of student population is Asian American. •A well-known, highly competitive specialized "science" high school. **A prestigious institution.** •**Typically, students go on to obtain graduate degrees -- professional careers often the goal.** •Low on school spirit, student culture not so much that of "partying" as putting energy into building profiles to get into reputed colleges. •Many student organizations based on race and ethnicity -- for instance, there are Indian, Jewish, Korean, and Muslim students' groups, among others.	•Small, private school, grades 5-12 -- total number of students is 650. •8.2% of student population is Asian American. •Academically highly regarded school, parents pay high tuition for it. **A prestigious institution.** •**Typically, students go on to obtain graduate degrees -- professional careers often the goal.** •High on school spirit, participation in sports, theatre, etc. While there are academically "driven" students, there is a distinct "partying" crowd among the student population. •One umbrella organization addressing issues of racial and ethnic diversity. Sub-groups organized around specific ethnicities have emerged recently.

[1] "Wentworth" and "Greenacres" are pseudonyms. The two schools are located in different boroughs of New York City. Also, **bold** characters in the table indicate how the two schools are **similar**. The other information highlights the contrast between the two schools.

Appendix B

Biographical Profiles Of Participants -- Socio-Cultural Data

Name of Participant x School (W=Wentworth, G=Greenacres)	Gender	Grade	South Asian Languages Spoken at Home	South Asian Region/ Community as Point of Reference within US	Religious Background of Family
Amit (W)	M	12	Hindi	Jain, jewelry community from Jaipur, India	Jainism
Anita (W)	F	11	Malayalam	Malayalee, Nair community from Kerala, India	Hinduism
Mary (W)	F	12	Malayalam	Malayalee Christians from Kerala, India	Christianity
Nitin (W)	M	12	Gujarati	Jain community	Jainism
Sanjoy (W)	M	12	Bengali	Bengali community	Hinduism
Balakrishna (goes by BK) (G)	M	11	Kannada, Hindi	none mentioned	Hinduism
Mohan (G)	M	12	Telegu	Indian community of doctors in the area	Hinduism
Poonam (G)	F	11	Hindi	none mentioned	Hinduism
Sharmila (G)	F	11	Bengali	mentioned family's decision to limit association with Indian community in area	Hinduism
Vijay (G)	M	12	Telegu	Indian community	Hinduism